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Kandy Nature and Wildlife Club

THE KANDY NATURALIST

Newsletter | Issue 01 | June 2026

Grizzled giant squirrel (*Ratufa macroura*)
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"A collective of wildlife enthusiasts sharing a passion for documentation, conservation awareness, and field-based understanding."

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K.B. Ranawana
Emeritus Professor
Department of Zoology
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It is with great pleasure that I address you through the inaugural newsletter of the Kandy Nature and Wildlife Club (KN&WC). This initiative marks an important milestone in our journey as a collective of wildlife enthusiasts who came together with a shared passion for bird watching and wildlife photography in and around the Kandy region.

What began as a small group of individuals with a keen eye for birds and natural landscapes has gradually evolved into a broader platform that now embraces diverse aspects of wildlife. Today, our club extends its focus beyond bird watching to include the study, documentation, and appreciation of a wide range of fauna and flora along with growing engagement in wildlife management, conservation awareness, and field-based ecological understanding.

Over time, we are proud to have attracted a growing membership base, enriched by individuals with varied expertise in wildlife photography, wildlife management, ecological research, and related disciplines. This diversity has significantly strengthened our capacity to observe, document, and interpret the natural world with greater scientific and artistic depth.

The steady expansion of our membership and the increasing level of engagement in our activities reflect the clear potential of this club to develop into a leading platform for wildlife-related learning and collaboration in the future.

As a significant step forward in this journey, we are now pleased to launch our first newsletter. This publication aims to share our observations, field experiences, photographic records, and insights, while also fostering communication among members and the wider nature-loving community.

I hope this newsletter will serve not only as a record of our activities but also as an inspiration for continued exploration, conservation awareness, and responsible appreciation of wildlife.

Thank you to all members for your dedication and enthusiasm in making this initiative possible.

K.B.Ranawana
Emeritus Professor

Recollections of Bygone Days

Nissanka Perera

Editor's Note

As we launch the inaugural issue of *The Kandy Naturalist*, we are honored to feature a rare historical perspective from one of our community's veteran observers. Mr. Nissanka Perera brings us "Recollections of Bygone Days," a series documenting his sixty years of plantation management across the Sri Lankan highlands.

In an era before digital sensors and instant uploads, documentation required patience and a keen eye. Mr. Perera's memoirs serve as a vital ecological baseline, reminding us of the biodiversity that once flourished—and what we must strive to protect today. We are grateful to him for sharing these invaluable records with the Kandy Nature and Wildlife Club.

Saliya Ambegoda

It is not often that one has the opportunity to indulge in a passion for wildlife and nature in the course of their daily employment. I was privileged to enjoy such a vocation in plantation management for sixty years, traversing the wet and intermediate zones of the central highlands.

Lest these memories fade, I wish to narrate what I have witnessed over the decades - observations that, in today's context of rapid deforestation and population growth, may seem almost unreal.

The Peaks of Bogawantalawa (1969)

My journey began in 1969 at Kew Estate, Bogawantalawa. Situated at 1585 m and bordering the Peak Wilderness Sanctuary, the estate felt like an extension of the wild.

Back then, the Ceylon Blue Magpie (*Urocissa ornata*) and the Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon (*Columba torringtoniae*) were not just rare sightings; they were frequent visitors to my garden. At the upper end of the estate sat a patch of virgin forest where these birds thrived. Today, those majestic trees are gone, replaced by low scrub jungle. While the Blue Magpie (*Urocissa ornata*) can still be found in pockets like Sinharaja, Kitulgala, or the Pidurutalagala Reserve, seeing them as "garden birds" is a memory I hold dear.

The Wilds of Poonagalla (1971)

In 1971, I moved to the Poonagalla Group in Bandarawela. This estate was unique for its elevational range, climbing from 152m in the Dry Zone to 1494 m in the Intermediate Zone. My favorite area was the Fellside Division, which bordered the Wellawaya jungles a pristine landscape of perennial streams home to elephants (*Elephas maximus*), Sri Lankan leopards (*Panthera pardus kotiya*) , and Ceylon spotted deer (*Axis axis ceylonensis*). I recall the strikingly beautiful Banded Peacock (*Papilio crino*) and Ceylon Oak Leaf (*Kallima philarchus*) butterflies being common sights there.

The western boundary near Koslanda also hosted a small herd of elephants (*Elephas maximus*); some descendants reportedly remain near the upper reaches of the Diyaluma Falls. In mid-1971, a wild elephant (*Elephas maximus*) appeared in the tea fields of the Broughton Division (1463 m), causing panic among the tea pluckers. This unusual high-elevation visit was attributed to the construction of the newly traced Ella-Wellawaya Road, which had disturbed the herd's traditional routes.

On clear nights at Poonagalla, one could see the horizon curving from the south toward the east, with the distinct light beams of the Great Basses, Little Basses, and Dondra lighthouses visible from 97 km away.

Encounters at Pidurutalagala (1982–1996)

From 1982 to 1996, I served at Kabaragalla Estate, a remote location reaching up to 1890 m. With no national grid power or phone lines, life was defined by the landscape.

The estate shared a four-mile boundary with the Pidurutalagala Forest Reserve. My weekly routine involved a trek through the virgin forest to reach the isolated Horagolla Division. It was on this path that I once physically encountered a full-grown Sri Lankan leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*). We stood our ground, and we both passed without harm, a testament to the fact that, if unprovoked, wild animals are rarely a threat.

In these high-altitude forests, I saw the specialized adaptations of our wildlife:

- **The Highland Bear Monkey (*Semnopithecus vetulus monticola*):** A short, stocky version of the Purple-faced Langur, evolved for the biting cold.
- **Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon (*Columba torringtoniae*):** Significantly larger than their lowland counterparts.
- **The Malabar Trogon (*Harpactes fasciatus*):** I once found a Trogon along the old bridle path near Kandapola so soundly asleep I could have reached out and touched him!

A Note on Technology

Readers may notice the absence of photographs accompanying this account. In those days, the sophisticated digital cameras we use today were the technology of the future. These memories were captured not on sensors, but in field notes and recollections.

This narrative will be continued in our next newsletter…..

The Energetic "Dancer" of Pallepola

Gajanatha Kobbekaduwa

Common Name: White-browed Fantail

Scientific Name: *Rhipidura aureola*

National Status: Least Concern (LC)

Global Status: Least Concern (LC)

Location: Pallepola, Sri Lanka

In April 2024, a lively pair of White-browed Fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*) took up residence in a Kadju tree (*Anacardium occidentale*) on an estate in Pallepola. These birds are small in stature but possess a "big personality," characterized by their striking black-and-white plumage and a broad white eyebrow that contrasts sharply against their darker features. True to their name, they are often seen spreading their long tails like a fan, flitting from branch to branch in a movement that looks remarkably like a dance.

Architects of the Garden

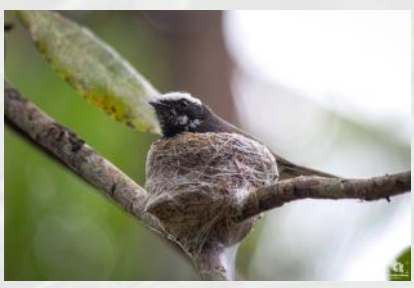
The pair demonstrated remarkable cooperation during the nesting season. Together, they constructed a neat, cup-shaped nest, typically situated on an outer, lower branch about two meters above the ground. The construction is a meticulous process using fibers, fine grass, and rootlets. To ensure the structure is both sturdy and well-camouflaged among the leaves, they use cobwebs to bind the materials together.

Once the nest is ready, the female typically lays two to three eggs. Both parents share the responsibilities of incubation and the demanding care of the chicks once they hatch.

A Natural Pest Controller

The White-browed Fantail is as functional as it is beautiful. Highly adaptable to habitats ranging from dry lowlands to the mid-hill regions, they serve as a natural check on insect populations. They feed on flies, ants, beetles, and termites, and are particularly beneficial for their role in controlling mosquitoes.

With impressive agility, they dart into the air to catch prey or flush hidden insects out of the foliage. Their presence in Sri Lankan gardens and scrublands is a testament to the vibrant biodiversity of our mid-country regions.



All photographs © Gajanatha Kobbekaduwe

Rare Eth Demata at the Primrose Garden

Aruna Prasanna Abeykoon

Common Name: Eth Demata

Scientific Name: *Gmelina arborea*

National Status: Vulnerable (VU)

Global Status : Least Concern (LC)

Location : Primrose Garden, Kandy

Observer: Anura Prasanna Abeykoon

© Prasanna Abeykoon

While exploring the area around Peradeniya and the narrow lanes of Primrose Garden, I came across several specimens of the Eth Demata (*Gmelina arborea*). This tree is a fast-growing deciduous species native to Sri Lanka and South Asia. It is a somewhat rare sight in this specific area, making the preservation of existing specimens a high priority.

Three months ago, these trees were in full bloom, making them easy to identify by their large, vibrant corollas which can range from yellow and orange to reddish or even pinkish-white. Currently, the trees have transitioned into their fruiting stage, bearing small, succulent drupes.

Botanical Characteristics

The Eth Demata (*Gmelina arborea*) is a medium- to large-sized tree with smooth bark characterized by scurfy flakes. Its leaves are decussate-opposite (growing in pairs at right angles to the pair above or below) and can reach lengths of 10-25 cm. The tree is highly valued for several reasons:

Medicinal Value: Traditional medicine utilizes the roots, bark, and fruit as a tonic or laxative. It is also being studied for potential antidiabetic properties.

Quality Timber: The wood is lightweight yet strong and durable, often used for furniture, musical instruments, and carpentry.

Edible Fruit: The succulent fruits of the tree are edible.

A Call for Conservation

Although commonly found in some home gardens, Eth Demata (*Gmelina arborea*) is listed as vulnerable in certain native habitats. Because of its rarity in the Kandy region, it is vital that we protect these trees. I have already reached out to nearby residents to inform them of the tree's value, requesting that they do not cut or destroy these beautiful specimens.

Eyes That Hold the Sky

Supun N. Samaraweera

Common Name: Dark-fronted Babbler

Scientific Name: *Dumetia atriceps*

National Status: Least Concern (LC)

Global Status: Least Concern (LC)

Location : Udawattakele Forest Reserve, Kandy

Observer: Supun Nayanajith Samaraweera

© Supun Nayanajith Samaraweera

Hidden within the lush greenery of Udawattakele Forest Reserve, a small and energetic Dark-fronted Babbler (*Dumetia atriceps*) pauses for a fleeting moment. Known for its constant movement through dense undergrowth, this bird is rarely still making such a calm, upward gaze a rare and rewarding sight. In this frame, the bird lifts its head toward the canopy, its pale yellow eye catching a glint of light that adds a sense of life and emotion to the encounter.

Behavior and Habitat

Locally known as “Hisa Kalu Panduru Demalichcha”, this species is often found moving in small, noisy groups. With its warm brown upper body, whitish underside, and distinct dark facial markings, it blends beautifully into its forest habitat. Despite its small size, its lively and skulking behavior makes it a challenging subject for any nature observer.

Behind the Lens

This moment was captured on a quiet morning following light rain, just before a forest walk with fellow members of the Kandy Nature and Wildlife Club. The damp conditions and low light of the forest floor, combined with the constant movement of the birds, made capturing the moment particularly difficult. At first, the group remained elusive, disappearing quickly into the foliage. However, with patience and careful observation, they reappeared, offering a brief opportunity to capture this expressive pose.

The Value of Urban Sanctuaries

Beyond its visual appeal, this observation highlights the importance of urban forest reserves like Udawattakele Forest Reserve. Situated within the busy city of Kandy, this forest serves as a vital refuge for wildlife. It is a powerful reminder that even in highly populated areas, nature continues to thrive, if we ensure it remains protected and respected.

The Little Jewel of the Central Hills

Chamith Chandrasekara

Nestled just 10 km from the vibrant town of Matale, in the quiet village of Warapitiya near the Knuckles Mountain Range, lies a hidden ecological treasure, a mere two hectare patch of protected forest that quietly shelters an extraordinary array of biodiversity. Though modest in size and largely unknown, this forest stands as a living testament to the richness of Sri Lanka's central hills.

Sudu Oya, a tributary of the Mahaweli River, runs through the habitat.
© Chamith Chandrasekara

Sri Lanka is home to over 500 recorded bird species, including 35 endemics and 236 resident species, while the rest are migratory. Remarkably, this small forest alone supports around 15 endemic birds, such as Crimson-fronted Barbet (*Psilopogon rubricapillus*) and Yellow-fronted Barbet (*Psilopogon flavifrons*), along with Crimson-backed Flameback (*Chrysocolaptes stricklandi*) and Red-backed Flameback (*Dinopium psarodes*). Layard's Parakeet (*Psittacula calthrapae*), Sri Lanka Spot-winged Thrush, Brown-capped Babbler, and the Sri Lanka Woodshrike (*Tephrodornis affinis*).

Also, rare and elusive resident birds such as the Legge's Hawk-Eagle (*Nisaetus kelaarti*), Black Eagle (*Ictinaetus malaiensis*), Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl (*Ketupa nipalensis*), Rufous Woodpecker (*Micropternus brachyurus*), Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), and the Black-throated Munia (*Lonchura kelaarti*), once considered endemic, now also recorded in India's Western Ghats are also found in this forest patch.

Black-hooded Oriole (*Oriolus xanthornus*) ©
Chamith Chandrasekara

Sri Lanka Woodshrike (*Tephrodornis affinis*).
© Chamith Chandrasekara

Seasonal migrants further enrich this habitat, including rare visitors like the Kashmir Flycatcher (*Ficedula subrubra*), Orange-headed Thrush (*Geokichla citrina*), and Himalayan Buzzard (*Buteo refectus*). Notably, in 2011, sighting of the rare Blue-and-white Flycatcher (*Cyanoptila cyanomelana*), in this forest patch highlights its importance as a migratory stopover.

Beyond birds, this compact forest supports a surprising diversity of mammals, including the Barking Deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*), Sri Lankan Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa cristatus*), Grizzled Giant Squirrel (*Ratufa macroura*), Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*), and the elusive Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*). Reptiles such as Ravana's Rough-sided Snake (*Aspidura trachyprocta*) and the endemic Hump-nosed Lizard (*Lyriocephalus scutatus*) thrive here, while butterflies like the Sri Lankan Birdwing (*Troides darsius*), Red Pierrot (*Talicada nyseus*), and Yamfly (*Loxura atymnus*) add flashes of color to the forest edges. Even its freshwater streams host endemic fish such as the Black Ruby Barb (*Pethia nigrofasciata*) and Ceylon Killifish (*Aplocheilus dayi*), while this small forest is home for thousands of plant species with many endemics.

Barking Deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*)
© Chamith Chandrasekara

Despite its small size, this forest is a biodiversity hotspot of remarkable importance. It reminds us that conservation is not only about vast national parks, but also about protecting these small, hidden sanctuaries. The Little Jewel of the Central Hills is not just a forest, it is a vital refuge, quietly sustaining life in all its forms.

Hump-nosed Lizard (*Lyriocephalus scutatus*)
© Chamith Chandrasekara

The Spotted-billed Duck: A Rare Treasure of Northern Sri Lanka

Chaminda S. Wijesundara , Department of Zoology, University of Peradeniya

The Spotted-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) is one of Sri Lanka's most endangered birds. Unlike other waterbirds found across the island, this duck is now largely confined to the Northern Province, making its survival especially fragile. To understand where these ducks live and how many remain, a group of researchers from the University of Peradeniya, led by the present author, carried out a five-year study from 2014 to 2018, visiting wetlands twice every month.

A spotted-billed duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) at Araly, Jaffna.
© Chaminda S. Wijesundara

By carefully counting birds at 772 different sites, the team found Spotted-billed Ducks at just 41 locations. In total, 333 individuals were recorded. Most sightings were of small groups, usually around four birds, but in June 2018, an unusually large flock of 181 appeared at Saravanai in the Jaffna Peninsula. It is believed that this was likely a group of migratory ducks joining the local population.

Other important sites included the Giant's Tank Sanctuary in Mannar, which supported about 10 ducks on average, and smaller flocks scattered across the Jaffna peninsula in places like Araly Junction, Mankumban, and Karainagar. Despite these scattered populations, numbers did not change much over the five years of study.

At present, only two of these areas, Giant's Tank and Nagar Kovil, are officially protected. Giant's Tank is designated as a sanctuary while Nagar Kovil is a nature reserve. The researchers stress that more wetlands should be declared conservation zones to safeguard this critically endangered species. Protecting these habitats is vital, not only for the Spotted-billed Duck but also for the rich biodiversity of Northern Sri Lanka's wetlands.

Spotted-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) - Part of the flock of 181 individuals seen at Saravanai, Jaffna, on June 9, 2018.
© Chaminda S. Wijesundara

Role of Sri Lankan Jackals (*Canis aureus nariya*) in Protection of Avian Reproductive Success in Wetland Ecosystems

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Abstract

Rodent populations (primarily *Rattus* spp. and *Mus* spp.) exert significant predation pressure on bird eggs, chicks, and nests in wetland and agricultural landscapes across Sri Lanka. This study synthesizes field observations and ecological theory to evaluate the role of the Sri Lankan jackal (*Canis aureus*) as a mesopredator that influences rodent abundance. We propose that sustained jackal activity can reduce rodent densities, thereby decreasing nest predation risk for groundnesting and lowcanopy bird species. Comparisons are drawn with similar ecological phenomena documented in New Zealand and other global systems where mesopredator indirectly benefit avian communities.

Key words : Jackals , Birds, Rodents, Nesting

Introduction

Wetland ecosystems in Sri Lanka support a high diversity of resident and migratory bird species, including waders, waterfowl, and passerines that rely on marshes, floodplains, and paddy-field margins for breeding and foraging (Murgui & Hedblom, 2017). Many of these species employ ground-nesting or low-vegetation nesting strategies, which, although adaptive in open wetland habitats, expose eggs and hatchlings to elevated predation risk (Regos et al., 2018). Nest predation is widely recognized as one of the primary factors limiting avian reproductive success and shaping population dynamics, particularly in landscapes influenced by agriculture and human settlement (Gunaratne et al., 2014).

Rodents such as *Rattus rattus*, *Rattus norvegicus*, and *Mus musculus* are common components of Sri Lanka's wetland–agricultural mosaics (Salgado et al., 2026). These opportunistic omnivores thrive in environments enriched by crop residues, irrigation systems, and anthropogenic food sources. Beyond their well-documented impacts on crops, rodents also prey upon bird eggs and nestlings whether they are located on ground or tree holes, contributing to reproductive failure in vulnerable ground- and tree hole nesting species (Ćirović et al., 2016). High rodent densities in wetlands can therefore represent a significant ecological pressure on avian communities (Salgado et al., 2026).

Mesopredators—medium-sized carnivores occupying intermediate trophic levels—are increasingly recognized for their regulatory role in ecosystem functioning. The Sri Lankan jackal (*Canis aureus naria*), a subspecies of the golden jackal (Canis aureus), is a widely distributed and ecologically adaptable carnivore inhabiting dry, intermediate, and wet-zone landscapes across the island (Journal & Article, 2014). As a generalist predator, the jackal consumes a broad range of prey items, including small mammals. Through direct predation on rodents and indirect behavioral effects—often described as the "landscape of fear"—jackals may influence rodent abundance, spatial distribution, and foraging activity within wetlands (Salgado et al., 2026).

Despite the ecological significance of such trophic interactions, the potential contribution of jackals to avian reproductive protection through rodent suppression has received limited scientific examination in Sri Lanka (Journal & Article, 2014; Salgado et al., 2026). Most local discourse surrounding jackals focuses on livestock depredation or scavenging behavior, with comparatively little attention given to their ecosystem services (Ćirović et al., 2016). Understanding how jackal-mediated rodent control may reduce nest predation risk is therefore critical for advancing wetland conservation and biodiversity management (Comazzi et al., 2016).

Evaluating the trophic linkage among jackals, rodents, and bird nesting success offers a broader ecosystem perspective that integrates predator ecology with avian conservation (Comazzi et al., 2016). Recognizing the Sri Lankan jackal as a potential biological regulator within wetland food webs may help inform balanced conservation policies that protect both native predators and vulnerable bird populations in rapidly changing agro-wetland environments.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Field observations were conducted in Bovila ($6^0$56’21.32”N; $79^0$59’47.21”E), Western Province, Sri Lanka, focusing on adult Sri Lankan jackals (Pushpakumara et al., 2023) and Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) (Pushpakumara et al., 2023). Observations were made using binoculars (Swarovski EL 8.5 × 42) and a spotting scope (Swarovski ATX 95 mm objective lens with a 30–70× zoom eyepiece). Photographic documentation was obtained through digiscopy by coupling an iPhone 12 Pro to the spotting scope using appropriate smartphone adapters, enabling high-resolution image capture from a safe distance without disturbing the animals (Salgado et al., 2026).

The study was conducted in paddy fields during October to December 2025. To ensure consistent sampling effort, 41 observation sessions were carried out at each study site, all during the dawn period between 6:00 am and 11:30 am. A total of 26 hunting events by jackals were recorded. For each event, the type of rodent captured, hunting behavior, capture success, and interactions with other jackals and nearby bird nests were observed and documented. All observations were systematically recorded in field notebooks for subsequent analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2. Ecological Background

2.1 Jackals as Mesopredators

Jackals (*C. aureus*) are generalist carnivores with flexible diets that include rodents, lagomorphs, insects, fruits, and carrion. Their nocturnal and crepuscular hunting patterns overlap temporally with rodent foraging, making them effective regulators of small mammal activity (Serva et al., 2023).

2.2 Field Observations Supporting Rodent Suppression and Implications for Avian Nest Protection

A total of 26 independent rodent predation events by the Sri Lankan jackal were recorded across wetland ecosystems in four provinces of Sri Lanka: Western, North Western, North Central, and Southern Provinces. Observations encompassed both actively cultivated and recently harvested paddy fields.

During these events, jackals were observed actively excavating rodent burrows, capturing rodents and consuming prey directly in the field Plate 01. Handling behavior, including prey manipulation and consumption, was consistently recorded, providing direct evidence of their role as natural predators of rodents in agricultural landscapes.

Plate 01. Active hunting behavior, including burrow excavation (A), prey capture (B), handling, and consumption in situ, providing direct evidence of the jackal's role as a natural predator of rodents in these habitats.

The spatial distribution of predation events exhibited clear regional variation (Figure 1). The highest number of observations occurred in the Western Province (n = 12; 40.0%), followed by the North Central Province (n = 8; 26.7%). Fewer predation events were documented in the North Western Province (n = 4; 13.3%) and Southern Province (n = 2; 6.7%). The higher frequency of rodent-hunting activity in the Western and North Central Provinces suggests these regions may offer more favorable conditions for jackal foraging. Nonetheless, predation events across all provinces indicate that jackals contribute to rodent population regulation throughout diverse agro-ecological zones, highlighting their potential role in ecological pest control and mitigation of rodent-borne diseases such as rat fever.

Field observations at Bovila Wetland further documented active predation on rodents by individual jackals (Figure 1; Plate 1). Individuals engaged in targeted subterranean hunting, repeatedly excavating rodent burrow systems and capturing multiple rodents within short periods. Hunting sequences were characterized by intense digging, with jackals occasionally almost entirely submerged within burrows, indicating precise localization of prey beneath the soil surface. These behaviors suggest the use of acute auditory and olfactory cues and demonstrate considerable energetic investment consistent with profitable prey capture. Predation occurred during low-light periods, temporally overlapping with peak rodent foraging activity, increasing encounter and capture success.

Taken together, these observations support a functional trophic linkage within the wetland ecosystem. Sustained jackal predation may contribute to localized suppression of rodent populations or alter rodent behavior and space use, thereby reducing nest intrusion frequency and predation risk. These findings provide field-based support for the proposed role of the Sri Lankan jackal as an indirect facilitator of avian reproductive success through rodent population regulation.

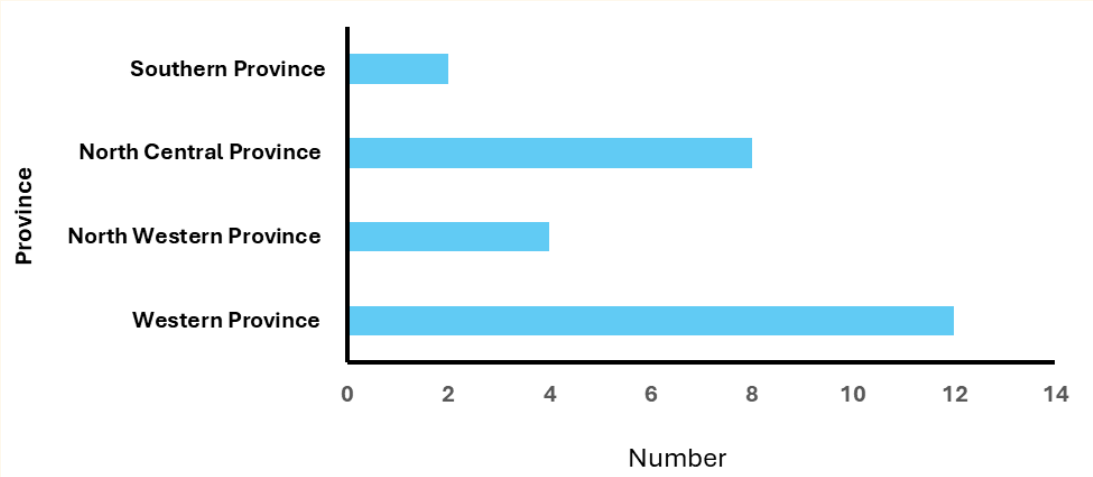

Figure 1. Distribution of recorded rodent predation events by the Sri Lankan jackal (*Canis aureus naria*) across four provinces in Sri Lanka (n = 26). A higher frequency of observations was recorded in the Western and North Central Provinces compared to the North Western and Southern Provinces.

Complementing these observations, photographic evidence confirmed the presence of rodents occupying nest cavities of Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) within the same wetland habitat. Images documented rats emerging from active or prospective parrot nesting holes, demonstrating direct spatial overlap between rodents and cavity-nesting birds (Plate 02). Such occupation of nest cavities by rodents poses a significant reproductive threat, as rats are known to consume eggs, hatchlings, and nesting material, potentially leading to nest failure.

Plate 02. Photographic evidence of rodents occupying nest cavities of the Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) within a wetland habitat. The images show rats emerging from active or prospective parakeet nesting holes, indicating direct spatial overlap between rodents and tree hole-nesting birds.

Taken together, the observed jackal predation events and documented rodent intrusion into avian nesting sites support the hypothesis of a functional trophic linkage within the wetland ecosystem. Sustained predation by jackals may contribute to localized suppression of rodent populations or alter rodent behavior and space use, thereby reducing nest intrusion frequency and predation risk. These findings provide field-based support for the proposed role of the Sri Lankan jackal as an indirect facilitator of avian reproductive success through rodent population regulation.

2.4 Consequences for Avian Nest Survival

Rodent predation on avian nests is well documented globally (Morozov, 2022).

In Sri Lanka, species such as the Sri Lanka Wood-Shrike (*Tephrodornis affinis*), Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*), and Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) construct ground-level nests that are highly vulnerable to rodent incursions, especially during the breeding season.

By reducing rodent densities, jackal predation may:

- Lower frequency of rodent contact with nests.
- Reduce successful nest breaches per breeding season.
- Increase overall fledgling output and long-term population stability.

These proposed benefits mirror similar mesopredator benefits documented in New Zealand, where controlled removal of invasive rodents led to increased nesting success for many ground-nesting birds (e.g., kiwi species and petrels) (Donnell, 2010) .

2.5 Comparative Insights from Other Systems

In New Zealand, eradication or suppression of rodents (both rats and mice) on islands and mainland sanctuaries has directly correlated with enhanced reproductive success among endemic birds. Although Sri Lanka's ecosystems are distinct, the functional trophic similarities suggest that native predators, including jackals, can fulfill analogous regulatory roles in controlling rodent populations.

Conclusion

The Sri Lankan jackal *Canis aureus* likely exerts a suppressive effect on rodent populations through active predation, especially in wetland and agricultural landscapes. This ecological role may indirectly bolster avian reproductive success by reducing rodent-driven nest predation. Recognizing jackals as beneficial mesopredators reframes their conservation and management within a broader ecosystem services context.

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Photo gallery from our FB group

Pale-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*)
© Saman Priyantha Fernando

Ruddy Mongoose (*Herpestes smithii*)
© Nuwan Wickramarathne

Dark-fronted Babbler (*Dumetia atriceps*)
© Supun N Samaraweera

Indian Scops-Owl (*Otus bakkamoena*)
© Lakmin Chanditha

Asian green bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*)
© Venerable Amarakiththi

SUBMISSION FOR ISSUE 02

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Message from the Secretary / Editor

It is with great pride that we launch the inaugural KN&WC newsletter, a bridge between the scientific community and nature enthusiasts. As we navigate 2026, our club has become a vibrant collective of photographers and researchers.

Our recent field visits have been truly extraordinary. From capturing the elusive Gray Slender Loris (*Loris lydekkerianus*) at Popham's Arboretum to tracking *Strigiformes* (Owls) during our Debarawewa nature trip, our members have shown incredible skill and patience. Our frequent excursions to the Udawattakele Nature Reserve, the mist-covered Dunumadalawa Forest, and the Pekoe Trail continue to remind us that conservation begins with observation.

A particularly remarkable highlight was our journey to Horton Plains. We are deeply grateful to our President, Emeritus Professor K. B. Ranawana, who surprised every participant with a personally signed copy of his book, "*Flowers in Horton Plains*." This generous gift serves as both a beautiful memento and a vital scientific guide for our future explorations.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all members who have contributed their remarkable articles and photographs for this first issue. This newsletter is your voice, and your dedication to documenting our natural world is what makes this publication possible.

I invite you all to continue sharing your field notes and observations to help us solve the larger puzzle of biodiversity. Let us continue to explore, document, and protect the unique natural heritage of Sri Lanka.

Saliya Ambegoda
Secretary/ Editor, KN&WC

Committee Members:

Emeritus Professor K. B. Ranawana - President
Saliya Ambegoda - Secretary /Editor
Danushka Weerasekara Ph.D
Prasanna Abeykoon
Nissanka Perera
Gajanatha Kobbekaduwa

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

1	Jaffna Expedition - Focus: Bird watching
2	Sinharaja Trip - Focus: Birds and Flora
3	Meethirigala Forest Reserve- Focus: Birds

Scan to join our WhatsApp Group

Members with President Emeritus Professor K. B. Ranawana after receiving their signed book gifts at Horton Plains

Equipped and ready at Debarawewa: Our photographers preparing to track and document local *Strigiformes* (Owls).

Exploring our local biodiversity: President Emeritus Professor K.B. Ranawana leading a team of researchers and photographers at Dunumadalawa.

Setting foot on the trail: The team ready to explore the unique ecosystems along the first stage of the Pekoe Trail.

On the slopes of Udawattakele: Our team of photographers and researchers exploring the historic forest reserve in the heart of Kandy.

The serene grounds of Popham's Arboretum in Dambulla, our base for tracking the elusive Gray Slender Loris (*Loris lydekkerianus*).

Where the forest meets the water: Our team of researchers and photographers exploring the rich biodiversity of Dunumadalawa, a vital sanctuary in the heart of Kandy.

Navigating the terrain: KN&WC members on the trail during our exploration of the Pekoe Trail Stage 1 ridgelines.